not read, corrected & Sent

To Mr. Michael Briggs from Harold Weisberg, Part 2

With a little time before my ride to Johns Hopkins bets here, I begin to add to what I wrote earlier what I told Wrone I believe it is important for you (plural) to understand, what is uniquem within my knowledge and experience, to the field of political assassinations.

Perhaos my experience with Whitewash I can give you and insight into it.

I began with a contract that required me to deliver the manuscript by mid-February 1965. That was only five months after the Report was published, three months after the 26 appended volumes were available. The publisher, who since went broke, was drolling into the till avout his prepublication sale of 39,000 with no advertising and with the book not yet written when his vice president who, the night before, told me that this prepub volume in hardbac then was "a gold-platted best seller, made an unexpected rush trip to Washington. When he returned they broke the contract and did not even return the manuscript to me.

I then tried diligently, here and abroad, to get it published. I got more than a hundred rejectctions without a single editorial negatibe about it. That is what made a publsher of me, prehaps the country's smallest.

Wan you imagine that the first book on so momentous an event as the assassination of a President, could not find a publisher?

When I made a success out of it, without a cent to spend for advertising or promotions, Dell, having rejected it three timeds, came to me for it. With the crooked count (I have copies of a printing not included in its accountings) all I can say about the number of copies Dell sold is that there were at least four printing and that the first was of 250,000 copies.

At the 1966 ABA convention quite a few of those who had been afraid to touch the subject and then told me that, told me that they would have really cleaned up on the book. But even then not one asked me to let him read any seq uel.

That first book on the assassination also got not a single review in any newspaper of any importance. When a book editor himself wrote a tavorable review for the WashingtonPost the managinf editor killed it, saying ths the reviewer did nit knlw enough about the fact to evaluate yhe book. Depite which the Post used me extensibely as a source on the subject for three decades at least.

There is fear of anything that appears to be factual. What had little or no trouble being printed commercially was books that could be apologizedfor, that were of conjectures or were not based on the official evidence.

Why this was so can be conjectured but the fact is without question. I have a full file drawer of records of this as part of the vast record for historythat I

leave. Along with what Kurtz has no knowledge of, more than two dozen book-length rpugh drafts of critical examination of the extreme books of both extremes. Until Wrone's book is published, I am the lonely man in the middle, the only one who limited himself to the official evidence in his first nine books.

Kurtz, without factual citation of a single mistake I made (and of course I made a few. Very few and not one a serious error, attributes many errors to me but the fact is that for all the severity of the citicism I made of specified Commission Members and employees, not one, in n w almost 35 years, has phoned or written me to complain that I had been unfair or inaccurate in anything I wrote about him. Ad as in detail I do not now go into, the most conservative of the Commission Members, Richard B. Russel of Georgia, encouraged me until his dying day, regreted that his health and other obligations prevented his doing more than encourage me, and he had a high opinion of my work, then four books.

What was done t stifle Russell and to misrepresent his beliefs you would not think possible in the United States, but it is thoroughly documented.

With this a glimmer of the background, was there any encouragement for any professors to try to find the time required for any real examination of the JFK assassination or of its investigations? Was there not a basis for sophisticated professors fearing a backlash and that their schools could also be victimized, with just about all depending on federal help to some degree?

Q side from fear, for a real scholar, one proud of his work and seeking full understanding and accuracy, what the Warren Commission published was ebough to warn that responsible work was not possible with that great mass without the investment of a great amount of time. And the cost that and more represented. Aside from the Report, or more than 900 pages and in itself rather daounting, there were those w6 volumes of the officially-extimated 10 million words and soo there was that initial 200 cubic feet of Commission records available at the Archives.

How many real scholars could believe that they could write fairly and truthfully without at the least a major study of that incredible mass of words?

Aside from these influences on the thinking of professors, there was the lack of media interest in what was critical of the Commission. For example, no single revuew od the first and severely critical book, Whitewash I.

This is a brief indication of what influenced the professorial mind and warned that attempting a factual and responsible work could invite serious trouble.

Basic as my books on the JFK assassination are, and professors heard of them from students and from talk shows, not a single one of them was reviewed by any daily newspaper or an Sunday paper.

That, too discouraged serious, responsible professors. And those who were

willing to do what was required to get the attention so useful ir not also valuable to them, including some of the most respected, like Ambrose, benefited from support of the works that supported the official assination mythology.

And other professors ~~xx~~ heeded and learned from this, with Ambroke but one of many,

The alternative was assassination junk, of which the Kurtz book is an example, the wild conjectures by those who regarded themselves as Sherlock Holmes returned, and of this, too, Kurtz is an example. They dreamed up the whildest "solutiona," none based on fact, and there was less, much less, publisher foear for what could be apologized for, what did the government no harm, which meant enticed no government retaliation.

Puboishers, University publishers in particular, are entitled to believe, knowing nothing to the contrary, which few if any did, that a respected professor, particularly one with a book on the subject piblished by another universit press, would be a fine selection for a peer review. But with Kurtz that is the exact opposite of the reality.

He imagines himself what he is not and despite his loudness and his pretenses he is, really, a subject-matter ignoramus. As his book demondatrates and as the review I sent indicates.

I doubt if there are ten professors in the court who are well -informed on the subject, well-informed from the official records. They can easily be informed about the wildest conjectures because thet were much more easily published.

Not only is there the considerable amount of time required to master what was readily available, there was the cost. Going to an living in Washington and using the Archives for a summer was a vert considerable cost and it also used up time many professors wanted for other purposes. Getting the copies by mail was also costly, with Archives copies then costing 25 cents a pape and agency copies costing as little as ten cents a page, But home mayy teaching profeesors fould take the time to read and aster all of that? In addition to the cost? If any wanted to study as little a percentage of what was ultimately available as the t hird of a million pages I recued from official oblivion, aside from the cost, how many had room for the 60 file cabinets this required? Or, with families and with children to educate, could afford all those file cabinets?

Then, with the 1992 Act requiring disclosure of all that related to the assassination, the assassination nut who forced this through did not get any new fact of the assassination disclosed but they certainly made what was available

much less accessible from the vastbess of the papwr alone. Published accounts of what the Assassinati n Reco ds Review Board forced into the public domains run up to 4 and 6 million pages! Who can possibly work his way through that mass? If any could take the time and meed the costs of a mere third of a million pages?

Aside from all else that can be said about Kurtz, he did not bother to get all that were first made acessible by my efforts and that of one other critic to forestall which the FBI made what it misrepresented as voluntary disclosures. They wereintended to end disclosure efforts and in that they failed because of my suots which made other headquarters and many field office records available. The disclosed FBI record do not reflect that Kurts bought any of those disclosures. They do disclose that his school bought only the first fraction that were made available.

So, even if Kurtz did real scholarly work on that portion, as his own book procalims he did not, he would still be ignorant of most of the disclosed FBI headquarters records and those of all the field offices.hthat were disclosed.

My file shows no single inquiry from him despite the well-known fac that I made all I have freely available to all writing in the field and if they come here, even now, they can use out copies. They find here what they do not find in any official archive, records arranged by subject. Officially they are filed in the order in which they reach the files, usually weeks to months apart and sometimes even years our of sequence.

The actuality is that some of the professors who wrote about the assassination, supposedly about the assassi ation, wheote the worst books on it. In particular is this t ue of wo of those of whom Kurtz thinks well, melanson and Fitzer, whose name Kurtx did not even get right. They are no authentic subject-matter experts, either, much as they pretend to be. They misrepresent themselves and because they are professors they are believed.

So as the time I have to suspecn approaches, I stop by asking you to conside how many university or other presses had the knowledge reflected above when they consider an assassination book or had the knowledge required to get authentic subject-matter experts to do their peer reviews? It is close to impssible.

It is possible that competent reviews can be obtained from those who are not sibject-matter experts but that was not the basis on which you chose Kurtz, and on what you could know you had no reason not to believe that you could not trust his word. But I have given you a means of learning for yourself that you can't rrust what he says about the assassination. This does not mean that he is no competent in his field but on the assassi ation he is both a wild man and one

who avoids traditional professional responsibilities. The most obvious exampof this is the total lack of specification of all the mistakes he attributes to me, which is his way of getting at Wrone and indulging himself in expressions of his hatred of those who think other than he does. Not one specification of any error by me, not one proof that anything I wrote was an error. But that was his most often repeated slur in his hardly hidden undermining of the Wrone book, which, unlike his, is based entirely on the officiao fact.

You can judge better than I what is ethical and what is unethical but I believe that what he probably withheld from you is unethical, his professional dispute with Wrone of some years ago. Wrone wanted the convention of the Southern HistoricalAssociation, then meeting on Kraft's turf, New Orleans to yhar more than one view of the assassination, the one view Kurtz had arranged for, by Mark Lane. Wrone wanted another view by a mature person. There was finally a compromise. Kraft did not object to a college studet to speak along with Lane. But when that student, Howard Roffman, was selected, Kurtz suffered the not inconsiderable disgrace of his hero, Lane, fearing confrontation with that student and not showing up at all!